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V CORPS SIGNAL BRIGADE TAKES THE LEAD IN TRAINING ITS SOLDIERS FOR TOMORROW, TODAY

By Pfc. Michael Howard
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DARMSTADT, Germany -- The next time Soldiers deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan, sophisticated communications tools used today by general officers could be in the hands of company commanders. As the Army's Signal Corps transforms for the future, today's Soldiers are reaping the rewards, thanks in part to "data package training" offered by V Corps' 22nd Signal Brigade, said Maj. Maureen J. O'Connor, the brigade engineer.

PFC MICHAEL HOWARD
Lisa Collins, a senior field specialist trainer and class instructor, assists students from V Corps' 22nd Signal Brigade in a data package training class the brigade created to keep its Soldiers current on trends in Army signal transformation.

The Signal Corps is changing now more than ever, says O'Connor. "The difference between [the current communications network] and the transformed Signal Corps is dramatic. I don't know if the Signal Corps has ever changed this drastically in its history."

The 22nd Signal Brigade launched into that transformation headfirst. With O'Connor at its head, brigade operations and engineering experts used existing equipment and

space to create a training center of vital importance to transformation. And they did it almost cost-free.

"The Army is transforming, and we're taking the initiative to transform with it. But the Army can't provide the material to every unit. So the 22nd Signal Brigade is picking up the slack," said O'Connor.

The next time Soldiers go to the field, they could find their internet connection speed has accelerated from relatively sluggish "dial-up" to lightning-fast "cable." The data packages that 22nd Soldiers are training on create a reliable, stable network that is many times faster than the current system, explained Chief Warrant Officer 3 Freeman Myers, a V Corps network manager and data package class instructor.

The class provides training on these packages, but not without some challenges, Myers added. "The bottom line is, we have to train these guys on a whole lot of things in a very short time," he said. "To that effect, we set up the testing and training facility to provide these Soldiers with an environment in which they can learn this equipment."

If the 22nd didn't take the initiative to train its Soldiers on data packages, a future deployment could be hampered by a general of lack knowledge of the network in future theaters of operation. "When we redeploy, we will be able to integrate smoothly with the equipment already there, and our Soldiers will have the knowledge to operate it."

As well as being in line with the needs of the Army and the brigade, the training is quite popular with the Soldiers.

"This is a great class. There's no other class where you learn so much so fast. It expands my career potential … and you get to work on some of the Army's most sophisticated equipment," said Spc. Claudius Atkinson, a former network operator and soon-to-be data package operator with the brigade's B Company, 440th Signal Battalion.

"The Soldiers are champing at the bit to get into this class. They want the training, and they see that not only the army, but the rest of the world is going in this direction, and they're dying to join in," said O'Connor.